

Sara Verbrugge (U. Leuven), Sandrine Zufferey (U. Geneva), Pim Mak & Ted Sanders (U. Utrecht)

Project report of the meeting held on April 13-15 in Leuven

This project aims to provide a cross-linguistic comparison of the use of epistemic vs. content relations across three different populations: adults, normally-developing children and autistic children. In this second project meeting, we analyzed and discussed the first results of the project. We also finalized the materials

Processing by adult speakers: We analyzed and discussed the results of a first eye tracking experiment. The experiment consisted in a French adaptation of an experiment that had previously been run with Dutch speakers in Utrecht. The Dutch experiment measured reading times for content and epistemic relations, with the two connectives used to express them: *omdat* (content) and *want* (epistemic). The Dutch experiment contained three conditions: (1) sentences with each connective used to express its own type of relation (2) *want* used for content relations in addition to epistemic relations and (3) addition of linguistic markers to the *want*-sentences in order to place subjects in an epistemic context (*according to X, X thinks that Y*). In French, the connectives that stand as natural equivalents to *omdat* and *want* were *parce que* and *car*. One notable difference between these two experiments is that the two French connectives can also be used (less prototypically) to express the other kind of relation. Therefore, condition (2) was expanded to include content sentences with *car* and epistemic sentences with *parce que*. The results show that whereas *want* in Dutch guided the readers to a subjective interpretation of the previous segment, this was not the case for *car* in French. We discussed the implications of the findings for future experiments, and made plans for both an offline experiment and a new eye tracking experiment.

We further discussed future experiments which will focus on the *car/puisque* and *want/aangezien* pairs. The hypothesis under investigation is that in both languages, the use of *puisque/aangezien* implies that the cause segment is treated as part of the common ground whereas *car/want* introduce new information. This hypothesis will be tested using four conditions: sentences where the two connectives comply with this requirement and others that violate this constraint. A delay is expected in reading times in the latter case.

Acquisition by normally-developing children: We completed the materials of a comprehension experiment that will be used to assess the acquisition of connectives as a means to understand content and epistemic relations. We developed two short stories with 5 occurrences of each relation followed by *why*-questions. The experiment will be run in Dutch (in Utrecht) and in French (in Geneva). In Dutch *want* and *omdat* will be used, and in French *car* and *parce que* will be used to mark subjective and objective relations respectively. This experiment will assess the role of connectives for comprehension. The cross-linguistic comparison will provide answers to additional questions: do children acquire relations earlier when their language provide them with a specific connective in each case (in Dutch) compared to languages where one single connective is used (French)? If an advantage exists for Dutch children, does it persist in the absence of connectives?

Acquisition by autistic children: We received permission from the ethical committee to conduct the experiment.

Next meeting planned for autumn 2011.